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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BILATERAL WITH COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT ALVARO URIBE

Classified By: Ambassador Susan Rice for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Ambassador Rice met with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe at his request during his visit to New York for the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on September 24. Uribe, who praised U.S. government support for Colombia and the region in his recent U.N. General Assembly speech, thanked Ambassador Rice for continued U.S. support, especially in relation to the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA). The Colombian government remains concerned by their neighbors' reaction to the DCA, especially Brazil's highly negative response. Uribe also underscored Colombia's exasperation with the Venezuela government. End summary.

#### DEFENSE COOPERATION AGREEMENT

¶2. (U) In a introductory meeting with Ambassador Rice, Colombian President Uribe thanked the U.S. government for our sustained support and assistance to Colombia, especially in relation to the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA), which he sees as a solid manifestation of the increasingly strong U.S. - Colombian bilateral relationship. He remains concerned as to why Colombia's neighbors have publicly criticized the DCA, believing instead that neighbors should be thankful for the positive ramifications they will reap as Colombia continues to combat narco-trafficking. Ambassador Rice, in turn, thanked President Uribe for his clear, convincing defense of the agreement during the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

¶3. (SBU) Uribe said that the response to the DCA from neighboring countries has been mixed. Uribe described Peru, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and Guatemala as his more "moderate neighbors" who have been supportive of the Agreement. He called Brazil a "jealous neighbor" who sees the DCA as usurping Brazil's rightful regional leadership role and believes the recent agreement between France and Brazil is directly correlated to their concerns over the DCA. A/S Shannon reassured Uribe that the U.S. government has made it clear to Brazil that the DCA is a bilateral agreement and not the basis for extraterritorial action.

#### COLOMBIA'S NEIGHBORS

¶4. (SBU) Uribe confirmed that the Colombian government is working to reestablish relations with its "difficult neighbor", Ecuador, and is hopeful there will be an official announcement regarding renewed relations between the two countries in the coming week. He identified the issue of legal action against high-ranking Colombian officials as the most difficult of the remaining points of disagreement.

¶5. (C) Uribe spent considerable time during the meeting talking about his "most difficult neighbor", Hugo Chavez, stating that Colombia has made all possible efforts to get

along with Venezuela, but is frustrated that it cannot. Uribe went on to discuss the internal and regional economic challenges that are becoming evident as a result of the "dismantling" of the business environment in Venezuela, the marginalization of society which is growing increasingly impoverished, and labeled the security situation as "far worse than in Colombia". As proof of the worsening situation in Venezuela, he noted the increase of illegal drug flights over Venezuela which have decreased over Colombian air space, as shown in U.S. satellite photos. Uribe also noted that as investors leave Venezuela, Colombia has experienced an up-tick in the number of investors in Colombia's border towns. And, while Uribe welcomes this increase in investment within his borders, he noted Venezuela has historically been Colombia's number two trading partner and is concerned about possible future negative economic ramifications.

#### COLOMBIA'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE UN

¶6. (SBU) Uribe raised his efforts to improve the human rights situation in the country. He said Colombia has developed a good relationship with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay, whom he called a "tough customer", but someone who understands Colombia's complexities. He noted satisfaction that the U.S. had become a member of the Human Rights Council.

¶7. (SBU) At the meeting's end, Uribe asked his UN Permanent Representative, Ambassador Calaudia Blum, to raise Colombia's concern regarding the Children and Armed Conflict report. Of particular concern to Colombia is text asserting credible reports that children were used by the national armed forces

for intelligence purposes, as well as reports that members of the Colombian national armed forces have committed sexual violence against children. Colombia will approach USUN in the near future for assistance on this resolution.

¶8. (U) WHA Assistant Secretary Thomas Shannon has cleared this cable.

RICE